

## Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SREF

SUBJ: IPP-77: CAMP CONDITIONS

REF: STATE 282731

1. SUMMARY: AN INEXPENSIVE HOTEL "HOLDING CENTER" IN BANGKOK WOULD COST THE U.S. ABOUT \$25,000 FOR 1000 PEOPLE FOR 30 DAYS. IF THIS SUM IS BUDGETARILY SUSTAINABLE, THE CENTER WOULD HELP RELIEVE THE EXTREME PSYCHOLOGICAL STRAIN, PARTICULARLY ON REFUGEES WHO HAVE ARRIVED IN BOAT CASE CAMPS SINCE MID-SEPTEMBER. THE RTG AND THE UNHCR WOULD PREFER THAT THIS FACILITY BE ESTABLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES. WE BELIEVE THE DISADVANTAGES OF A HOTEL IN THAILAND OUTWEIGH THE ADVANTAGES. END SUMMARY.

2. INS AS OF DECEMBER 2 HAD APPROVED 2030 BOAT CASES, OF WHICH 845 HAVE BEEN SPONSORED (578 HAVE DEPARTED AND 267 ARE OUT-PROCESSING). THE BALANCE OF 1185 REMAIN PRINCIPALLY IN THE CAMPS; A FEW ARE IN BANGKOK'S DIN DAENG TRANSIT CENTER. THESE CAMPS ARE FAR FROM THE MAUGHAM VISION OF A SOUTH CHINA SEA BEACH RESORT, BUT ARE HABITABLE EXCEPT FOR THE "NEW" CAMP IN SONGKHLA FOR POST-SEPTEMBER 15 ARRIVALS.

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3. THE PRESSURE TO MOVE BOAT REFUGEES IS LESS BECAUSE OF PHYSICAL CONDITIONS IN THE CAMPS THAN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL THREAT OF FORCING REFUGEES BACK OUT TO SEA. ICEM HAS THE CAPACITY OF MOVING MORE THAN 1000 REFUGEES PER MONTH TO THE U.S. AND IS NOT STRAINED BY OUR PRESENT MONTHLY DEMANDS OF AROUND 250. THE OBVIOUS SOLUTION IS FOR ACVA TO ACCELERATE SPONSORSHIPS.

4. GIVEN THE MORATORIUM ON REFUGEE MOVEMENTS TO THE U.S. BETWEEN DECEMBER 17 AND JANUARY 3, THERE THUS PROMISES TO BE WELL OVER 1000 IPP-77 APPROVED CASES REMAINING IN THAILAND THROUGHOUT DECEMBER. IN ADDITION TO THE ABOVE IPP-QUALIFIED REFUGEES, INS HAS APPROVED 492 BOAT REFUGEES FOR CONDITIONAL ENTRY (CE). THE HOTEL WOULD THUS HAVE TO ACCOMMODATE SOME 900-1000 REFUGEES OUTSIDE OFFICIAL TRANSIT CENTERS.

5. LOCAL INEXPENSIVE HOTELS IN THIS AREA RUN \$3-\$5 PER NIGHT. A VERBAL, UNOFFICIAL QUOTE FROM A HOTEL USED OCCASIONALLY IN 1975/76 WAS \$10 PER NIGHT FOR 6 TO 8 PEOPLE PER ROOM. EVEN AT \$5 PER NIGHT, AND 6 PEOPLE PER ROOM, THE MONTHLY COST OF LODGING A MAXIMUM OF 600 REFUGEES COMES TO \$15,000. THE COST FOR 1000 PEOPLE FOR 30 DAYS WOULD BE \$25,000. THE UNHCR WOULD PRESUMABLY PICK UP RATION COSTS. MANAGEMENT OF THE HOTEL, AND CONTROL OF THE REFUGEES HOUSED THERE, SHOULD BE AN RTG OR UNHCR RESPONSIBILITY. THE U.S. MISSION SHOULD NOT BE INVOLVED.

6. THE UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE'S REACTION TO THE POSSIBILITY OF OUR OPENING A HOTEL WAS THAT THE PROPOSAL WAS ATTRACTIVE, AND A GOOD SHORT TERM SOLUTION. IT WOULD GET APPROVED REFUGEES OUT OF THE CAMPS HE COMMENTED THE SITUATION WOULD BE EVEN BETTER IF SUCH A FACILITY COULD BE ESTABLISHED STATESIDE.  
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HE SAID IT WOULD OBVIOUSLY HELP THE PROBLEM HERE IF REFUGEES COULD BE PLACED OUTSIDE THAILAND PENDING SPONSORSHIP.

7. THE UNHCR AND WE HAVE SEPARATELY AND INFORMALLY APPROACHED THE RTG ABOUT OPENING ANOTHER TRANSIT CENTER, SUCH AS IN AN OLD MILITARY FACILITY. THE THAI HAVE SO FAR PROVEN UNRECEPTIVE TO THIS IDEA.

8. IN RTG EYES THE NEED IS NOT TO MOVE THE REFUGEES FROM THE CAMPS TO BANGKOK BUT TO MOVE THEM OUT OF THAILAND AS RAPIDLY AS POSSIBLE. THE UNHCR AND RTG PREFERENCE WOULD BE FOR A RECEPTION CENTER FOR INS-APPROVED BUT NOT YET SPONSORED REFUGEES IN THE UNITED STATES.

9. ONE FACTOR ARGUING IN FAVOR OF A HOTEL FACILITY IN THAT PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESSURES IMPINGING ON REFUGEES IN THE BOAT CASE CAMPS ARE PARTICULARLY SEVERE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE ARRIVED SINCE MID-SEPTEMBER. ANOTHER IS THAT RTG REFUGEE OFFICIALS TELL US THEY WILL STOP TURNING BOATS AWAY IF THE BOAT CAMP POPULATION DROPS SIGNIFICANTLY. FACTORS AGAINST ARE COST; THE SPECTRE OF OUR HAVING TO RUN THE HOTEL; A NEED TO AVOID THE IMPRESSION THAT THE U.S. RATHER THAN THE UNHCR IS THE

PRINCIPAL LEVEL FOR THE RTG TO PULL IN TRYING TO GET REFUGEES  
RESETTLED ABROAD; AND OUR SKEPTICISM THAT THE THAI REALLY  
WOULD STOP FORCING BOATS OUT TO SEA. ON BALANCE, WE RECOMMEND  
AGAINST THE HOTEL. IF THE DEPARTMENT NEVERTHELESS BELIEVES  
THAT THE ESTIMATED COSTS LISTED IN PARA 5 ARE SUSTAINABLE,  
AND THAT ACVA CANNOT GREATLY STEP UP ITS PACE OF OBTAINING  
SPONSORSHIPS, WE WILL, UPON INSTRUCTION, EXPLORE WITH THE THAI  
THE POSSIBILITY OF OPENING A HOTEL FACILITY IN BANGKOK.  
O'DONOHUE

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